

Low and high English Language proficiency of the learners in Pakistan: A comparative study of two different education systems

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Abstract

Two types of imparting education are in vogue in Pakistan. First, the system that imparts education to more than 90% of the students (Studying through the syllabus and method of Pakistani system) and second is the one that is imparting education to only 10% of the students (Studying through the syllabus and method of Cambridge education system) in Pakistan. The methodologies of teaching English and its syllabus are quite different from each other. The researcher (Teacher of English for Pakistani as well Cambridge system) observed a marginal difference in the level of English language proficiency of the learners studying under these two systems of education. The learners of Cambridge system are found highly equipped with the knowledge of English language but the learners of Pakistani system are lagging behind in the knowledge of English language although students of both the systems are being taught by the Pakistani teachers. Observing this fact, the researcher has focused to conduct research to point out the salient features of these two systems describing the reasons of high proficiency of English language by the learners of Cambridge system and low proficiency by the learners of Pakistani system. This study has been conducted by taking interview of the two students selected one from each system of education. The interview is analyzed critically and lot of attention, reaching at the conclusion that the syllabus, knowledge of teacher and methodologies adopted by the instructors play a vital role in gaining high proficiency of English language by the learners studying through Cambridge system of education.

Keywords: Elite school, Public School, Medium of Instruction, English language, O/A level of Education, National Education Policy

1. Introduction and literature review

1.1. English language policy

There are number of languages spoken in Pakistan. In all the four provinces of Pakistan there are many languages that are used along with one dominant language. The linguistic map of Pakistan shows that it is linguistically a complex country. The society of Pakistan is multilingual and multicultural. The historical perspective and the symbolic status of English language has provided a high status to it (Haque 1983, Rahman 1998, 2002). Rasool and Mansoor (2009) has found that English in comparison to Urdu, National Language, is the language of power and elite and it enjoys the same status as compared to the languages used locally. A new policy of teaching English language on equality basis is introduced by every government that came into power in Pakistan. English enjoys high status in the society so a new policy is considered for democratic equality of the masses so the governments gave special status to introduce some new ideas in the teaching of English language. As it is said that every new government introduces English language

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policy as political gain so it naturally falls back in monitoring and development. Every new government introduces a new English language policy without taking into consideration the facts of teachers' ability to teach and the difference of social class in the society. These politically motivated policies hardly make a similarity to two way or two systems of teaching of English language. Due to the importance of English language, it has become the main educational agenda of every government

1.2. Urge for English language

English is an international language and its use is increasing day by day. It is believed that command on English language provides better opportunities to upraise the economic and personal improvement. This is the reason that the young generation urges to learn English language in Pakistan. It is firmly believed that having command on English language makes an individual capable to survive in the global world. Rehman (1999) conducted a survey to know the mindset of the students towards English language and he investigated that the students from all the social classes of Pakistan showed keen interest to learn English language. He found that the student in all the public and private schools including the students of *DEENI MADARIS* (Religious Institutes) have a strong desire to learn English language due to its wider scope as an international language. Mansoor (2005) found that in higher studies the need to learn English language is higher and without the knowledge of English it is difficult for them to improve themselves.

1.3. Role of socio-economic status

Proficiency in English language is linked to the socio-economic status of the learners. The students with good economic condition get good command on English language as compared to the learners having poor economic background. The learners with sound economic background are upper third of the population and the learners with low economic background are lower two thirds of the population. It is observed that the learners with sound economic background have higher level of English language proficiency because of their early education in good private schools (Rassool and Mansoor 2009)

1.4. Introducing language at an early age

It has been mentioned earlier that English language policy is introduced by every government as a political move instead of implementing it after having the feasibility report or well researched plan (Shamim 2008). The education policy of the government of Pakistan (2009) is not found very different than the previous policies of education introduced by the political governments. It was recommended in the education policy of 2009 that English would be taught as compulsory subject from grade 1. It was also recommended in the policy that English would be used as medium of instruction from class IV onwards. Cohemen (2010b) mentions that the policy is unclear in many of its aspects including the recommendation to teach Mathematics and Science in English Language at an early stage of class IV and V is in contradiction with the previous statements of selecting a language as instruction medium between class I and V.

1.5 Own and international language

It is said that learning one's own language is thought to be the basic human right at present (cf. Segota, 2001). At the same time, it is a global world and it is the need of the hour for individuals to get ability and skill to strive for a better future in the world. The same challenge is faced

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by the universities of Pakistan as they have to equip the students with the knowledge of English to make academic excellence and serving the local population in the meanwhile.

1.6 Multilingualism: A world phenomenon

Multilingualism is a phenomenon vogue in the world now a days. It's a trend that has gain the attention of all the policy making in the world. It is further used in celebrating the approach of language policy-making to recognize the linguistic diversity. National Focus group on languages of India (NCERT 2005) has focused on the formula of three languages in the state including one national and international language.

There is a marginal shift in the attitude of the people towards multilingualism because it has become the reality of various states of the world. There are complexities in delivering education by more than one languages. These are the facts highlighted in the position paper of UNESCO entitled 'Education in multilingual world' (2003).

There are many countries in the world where education is imparted in multilingual context. There are many countries in the world where multilingualism is a way of life rather than an issue to be solved. These complexities are part of our system but efforts must be made to provide quality education to all and sundry by taking steps to overcome the impact of these complexities (UNESCO 2003:12).

Quality education can only be provided through the languages that do not restrict the learners to understand it and in the same context the African countries will remain dependent until they overcome the hurdle of imparting education in understandable language. This is the main issue of 21st century (Roy-Campbell 1998 cited in Brock-Utne 2000:173)

2. Research design

This study is conducted by taking interview of two students selected each from elite school and public school. The selected students study in O1 in elite school and Class 9th in public school respectively. Both the classes of O1 and 9th represent the same year of study in both the education systems. The researcher has design an interview containing five questions. The answers of the students will enable the researcher to develop a strong hypothesis about the marginal difference of English language proficiency of the learners studying in elite and public schools. The interview is further analysed to make some recommendations that may be opted by the policy makers to include in the education policy to get effective results.

3. Findings

As mentioned earlier, it is an interview based study and here is the design of the interview with questions asked from the students. The answers of the students are mentioned under every question. The student selected from elite school is named 'A' and the student selected from public school is named 'B'. All the questions are asked from both the candidates to make a comparison.

This interview describes that there is marginal difference in the education system adopted in elite schools and public schools. The competence of English language is far better in elite schools as compared to the public schools.

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Here is the table representing the questions of the interview and the answers of the selected students.

Sr. #	Questions	Answer of the candidate 'A' from elite school	Answer of the candidate 'B' from public school
01	How much difficulty do you feel when speak English Language?	I do not feel any difficulty while speaking English language. I have been speaking English language since I joined school in class 1. All my teachers use English language in my class and students are strictly forbidden to use any language other than English.	I cannot speak English language because I have never been asked by my teachers to speak English language. All the teachers in my school speak Urdu and local language in the class. We are taught English as a subject to cram and get good grades in the final exams.
02	Do you learn English language by translating it from English to Urdu?	No, I have been taught English directly without translating. The teachers focus to make the concepts clear.	Yes, I have always been taught English by translating it into Urdu language. I only understand English when I translate the words of English into Urdu.
03	Do you think you can write few paragraphs in English on any given topic?	Yes, I have the ability to write in English language as I have been taught to write creative writing.	No, I can write only on the topics which are being crammed by me in the class. There are selected topics given in our books of English and we cram it to get good grades. It is impossible for me to write on any unseen topic
04	What are the contents of syllabus of English in the prescribed books of English taught to you?	We are trained to appear in annual examinations of English paper which does not contain material from any prescribed book. Our teachers focus to teach us the basic four skills of language learning, I.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening. The command on these skills enable us to write all the answers asked in the question paper. Our question paper include unseen questions.	We are asked to cram the topics mentioned in our text book of English. It contains translation from English to Urdu, short questions and fill in the blanks. The annual exam contains all the questions from the text book taught to us.
05	How much difficult it is for you to pass the exam of English paper?	It is always easy for me to pass the exam of English. I have studied English from class 1 and I have got a good command on all the basic four skills of English language. I usually give less time to English as compared to other subjects.	It is always difficult for me to pass the exams of English. I usually give more time to English as compared to other subjects.

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4. Discussion

These two selected students have opened a new dimension of research in the field of applied linguistics. Living in one society and having two different systems of education is itself a matter of division and a sense of social stratification. The marginal differences of the systems of imparting education and teaching English language create irregularity in society.

The student selected from public sector school could not understand the questions in English language so the researcher translated every question into Urdu for his understanding. On the other hand, the student selected for interview from elite school fluently answered all the questions in English language and the researcher hardly found any grammar or pronunciation mistake in his speaking. The answers of the students have helped the researcher to develop a strong hypothesis in favor of teaching English as a language instead as subject.

The students who are exposed to English language at an early age show better proficiency as compared to those who start learning English language at adult age. This study is very interesting in this regard because the students of elite schools and public schools are exposed to English language at a very early age but the difference of proficiency is notable. The students studying in elite schools face no hurdle in speaking English but the students of public schools show complete reluctant in speaking English language. This study explores that exposing second language at an early age is not the solution but the method of exposing is more important. There is a difference of teaching English as subject and language. English is being taught as subject to the students of public schools and when it is taught as a subject the students focus to cram the lessons just to get good grades instead of getting command on language abilities. On the other hand, English is being taught as a language to the students of elite class and as a result they get good command in all the basic four skills of language that is, reading, writing, listening and speaking. Getting command in language skills enable them to have proficiency in English language. They do not need to cram the lessons of English instead they become creative and English becomes a language for them like their own mother tongue or national language.

These two systems of educations are poles apart from each other. Social class plays an important role in deciding the fate of the students. The students with good economic background enjoy the status of studying in elite schools because these schools take hefty dues from the students which can only be paid by the parents with sound economic background. There is another aspect of this approach and it takes us away from the fact of economic solidarity of the parents. In this regard, the students of public schools with poor economic background can enjoy a similar status of proficiency in English language if they are being introduced English as it is introduced to the students of elite schools. If the teachers of the public schools are trained efficiently to teach English as a language, the situation of the public schools students' will be changes positively.

Psychologically, this marginal difference of two education systems is playing a negative role in this regard. There is no competition among the students of elite schools and public schools because of the difference of teaching in two education systems. A student from elite school will feel himself confident and normal because of his command on English language. On the contrary, a student from public school hardly gets confidence because of the fear in his mind that he will be considered inferior as he lacks good command on English language. This psychological factor is the most crucial one as it keeps the students away from the main arena of market.

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Politically, English is the language of elite in Pakistan. The people of Pakistan praises the one who can speak English. It is very interesting to mention here that the intelligence level of an individual is calculated by the fluency of his speaking English language. The one with higher command on English language is considered intelligent than the one with lower competence.

5. Conclusion

English must be taught as a language and its method of teaching should be same in elite as well public schools. The difference in the English language proficiency between the students belonging to different classes will create social stratification. Students studying in elite schools get better opportunities in market for jobs as compared to the students of public schools. A society must be equipped with knowledge especially of official language in one manner, method and approach.

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